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AN INTERVIEW WITH VICTOR MARCHETTI

MAURY POVICH: The ingenious title of our novel -- written by our next guest, called "The Rope Dancer" -- I'm just sitting here wondering. Our guest is an astrologer -- did a chart on an astrologer (sic) and found out maybe they were better suited to another job like CIA agents, or rope dancing or something else -- maybe they shouldn't be an astrologer at all.

Would you please welcome to Panorama, I think the first -- no, the second -- second CIA agent ever to appear on this program. Allen Dulles was the first one. Wasn't he a CIA man?

JOHN WILLIS: He certainly was.

POVICH: He was the biggest CIA man there was wasn't he?

VICTOR MARCHETTI: At the time he was the Director.

POVICH: Mr. Dulles appeared on this show one time.

Do you know he wrote books...

MARCHETTI: Yes.

POVICH: ...other than straight books? He wrote novels, too, you know that?

MARCHETTI: No, I didn't know that.

POVICH: I think he did. I think he wrote a mystery and I think he had it on here one time. Believe it or not, the book was written about six or seven years ago before he left the Agency.

Mr. Victor Marchetti, former CIA agent has written this novel called "The Rope Dancer" and it has been -- it has been called a rather thinly veiled novel of the agonies of the Central Intelligence Agency today and exactly the policy struggles that go on in an agency like that. Would you say that's about true?

MARCHETTI: Yes, to a certain extent. It is, after all, fiction. And the characters and the situations, of course, are based on my personal experiences in the CIA. I was involved in the Berlin and East German issues from

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page to page. There are times when it's highly fiction and times when it's very, very realistic.

POVICH: You are featured in a cover story of John Willis's favorite magazine, U.S. News & World Report, which is now on the newsstands now and there is an article by you -- not -- on you I should say -- not by you, and an article taking the other side from what you have to say about the CIA. And you said something in this article that I'd like to go back on, Mr. Marchetti. You said, In talking about the CIA -- you said -- you described those agents as "honorable men, generally speaking, but the nature of the business is such that it is amoral. Most things are right or wrong, good or evil, moral or immoral. The nature of intelligence is, because they have to be done, whether it's right or wrong. If you murder, slash, end quotation. The next line: Marchetti did not complete the sentence. What was the end of the sentence?

MARCHETTI: Actually I was drawing an analogy between soldiers and an intelligence officer, explaining to the journalist that a soldier, generally speaking is a good boy, from good homes. He's been taught the difference between right and wrong, Ten Commandments, golden rule, and all that sort of thing. Yet, when he goes into the Army and has to go into battle, he is taught to kill. Now there's no way that he can tell himself that killing is right but in this instance it is acceptable, it's permissible. It is neither right nor wrong. It is something that has to be done.

And this is -- I was trying to draw an analogy and I think perhaps the journalist -- he did a very fine article. I think maybe it just didn't come out exactly right. I did not mean to imply that the CIA just goes around murdering people for no reason whatsoever.

POVICH: Lyman B. Kirkpatrick, Jr. I assume you know him?

MARCHETTI: Yes, I do.

POVICH: He is the former Controller of the CIA and now a political professor Brown University; also wrote an article in the same U.S. News & World Report hitting the other side -- giving to the CIA somewhat a different image than you give it. He said in his article "The CIA has not and does not engage in murder. It is not only practically impossible to conceal but it is unnecessary." What do you think about that?

MARCHETTI: Well, I would say I think that's probably true.

POVICH: It is?

MARCHETTI: It probably is true. I think if it is necessary -- if it would ever be necessary -- that someone would have to be eliminated for some reason -- I think that this would be the very last step that they would take and if so, it would require very high approval. I -- both, as I recall from my training, I think that the Director himself has to approve any sort of action of this sort and perhaps get approval from higher authority.

In any event, I don't think they would do it. And if they did have to do it, I think they would do it through cut outs so...

POVICH: What do you mean "cut out?"

MARCHETTI: Well, they would find -- for example -- if it had to be done, and say it was a guerrilla leader somewhere, they would try to find somebody else who would want to do the job.

POVICH: Like organized crime. Just hire a professional. The CIA obviously doesn't have those people around.

I was wondering -- it also said in this article by Kirkpatrick "That the CIA does not start wars." Is that true or untrue?

MARCHETTI: I'd say it's true that they do not start wars. The rub is, however, that since they are a secret organization with many, many assets and very little supervision other than from the White House, a few senators and other congressmen. They are a private tool of the Administration, so to speak. And if the President decides, as he did in Laos in 1962, that action was necessary there for some reason -- the CIA can be ordered in, and do a very good job of generating a war. In this instance it's -- they call it a counter-guerrilla war. It is a war, nevertheless.

POVICH: Did the CIA generate the coup against President Diem in South Vietnam?

MARCHETTI: My feeling is that they did, but...

POVICH: You were around at the time.

MARCHETTI: Yes, I was but...

POVICH: But you had nothing to do with it?

MARCHETTI: Nothing to do with it.

I should note were (?) in a section -- an operational section regarding Soviet military matters and not...

POVICH: It would be tough for you to know about things like that.

I have always wondered about this and apparently you are too, and these are some of your fears about CIA agents. The CIA was designed basically to handle cold war situations after World War II, and in Southeast Asia, and because that is winding down, you are quite fearful that the CIA is turning to domestic problems and domestic matters such as militant organizations, peace organizations, black organizations. And that they're now becoming an unwieldy tool of the politicians.

MARCHETTI: Let me clarify that a little bit, Maury. First of all, when we talked --- when I talked about this issue, I'm not talking about the

CIA alone. I'm referring to the other intelligence agencies as well, Army Intelligence, Air Force, Navy and so forth.

Now, secondly, one has to remember that the CIA was originally created to coordinate the intelligence efforts in the United States and largely to select and analyze information. This business of the cold war came along later. It's based on a very, very flimsy wording in the law -- that National Security Law of 1947. But nevertheless, it was when the cold war came along, they got thrown into the act and did an excellent job of preventing Communist subversion in Western Europe, the Middle East and various other places.

Now, knowing that the basic job is foreign intelligence, collection and analysis, they're up against it in the clandestine side of the business because technical intelligence today is so important and gathers most of the information needed. Secondly, the cold war is winding down. There just aren't that many opportunities to play operational games. These people are getting very much annoyed with paramilitary activities and the like.

You have a lot of talent and a lot of very interesting people, super patriots with a clandestine mentality. They've been trained to deal deviously and with people and manipulate people. And these -- I'm afraid that these people are looking inward now. And there are some signs of this. There was an excellent article...

POVICH: Specific signs?

MARCHETTI: Yes. Well, yes.

There was an excellent article in the New York Times on Sunday by Robert Smith where he discusses the falling out between the FBI and the CIA. The first half of the article is about that but the second half of the article is a list of grievances against the FBI and its ability to perform as a counter-espionage unit in the United States. Citing that they've only captured four Communist spies in the last few years. And the implications, the logical follow-on for this is that they're not able to do the job, therefore, someone else has to be able to do it. And this is a time of casting (?) and who is that someone else? The professional intelligence officers.

POVICH: I must read that article. Time's run out. I thank you very much for coming.

I was just wondering. Since you got out of the CIA, are you being followed at all?

MARCHETTI: I don't know if I'm being followed or not but...

POVICH: D'you think you're tapped? D'you think your wires are tapped?

MARCHETTI: It may be. But I -- they're putting pressures on me in various ways.

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Find out that even the CIA once they become civilians are just like the rest of us. Always subject to things like that.

I thank you very much for -- Victor Marchetti. The name of the novel is "The Rope Dancer." Fascinating tale of what the intelligence business is about in the country, in the world.

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